

Slaying the Writing Monsters: Scaffolding Reluctant Writers through a Writing Workshop Approach

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Drawing on four years of anecdotal data and student feedback on course evaluations, this paper provides a retrospective account of the author's experience with teacher candidates in an elementary writing instruction course as first-time authors of children's books, in particular focusing on a writing workshop approach as an effective pedagogical orientation to scaffold reluctant writers through the writing process. The primary diagnostic "tool" or form of assessment of student writing within the writing workshop model of instruction is accomplished through writing conferences. In the practice of conferring as a primary form of assessment, a constructive literacy approach is embraced within which the assessment of student writing is designed to offer ongoing targeted feedback and incremental goals for improvement, as well as guide subsequent re-engagement lessons. In the process, students' stamina as writers is built, the assessment stance and overall effectiveness as an instructor of writing instruction is improved, and the learning outcomes of the course are better met. The paper serves a paradigmatic or illustrative purpose that may inform other education professionals and contribute to their repertoire of pedagogical skills or assessment practices, encourage conversations about honing our craft as educators, and generate questions for future empirical analysis.

In the fall of 2009, I began teaching a course in Elementary Writing Instruction in an initial teacher certification program nested in a private, co-educational liberal arts college situated in the New York City metropolitan area. The course is designed to prepare teacher education students for the necessary competencies required in the practice of effective writing instruction in the elementary classroom.

The course focuses on a multi-genre approach to writing that provides learners with the opportunity to write in different contexts. The course learning outcomes emphasize the ability to identify language arts performance standards for elementary school, describe traits of good writing that enrich the writing process, implement a variety of assessment and record-keeping practices to monitor individual and class progress in writing, demonstrate the ability to adapt writing instruction for exceptional and multilingual learners, and design strategies in the teaching of writing that attempt to shift the control of literacy from the teacher to the student.

Several types of writing are explored over the course of the semester including narrative, functional, persuasive, expository, and poetry. While students produce short representative assignments in each genre, a considerable amount of time is devoted to narrative writing. My motivation for devoting time to narrative writing rests in the transformative potential of telling stories about our lives, as well as the key shifts in the language arts curriculum toward greater learner engagement in informational reading and writing as commanded by the national move toward Common Core State Standards (CCSS), now adopted by 46 states and the District of Columbia, disproportionately requiring more evidence-based, technical writing.

It was during the narrative genre that I launched a capstone project that required students to write and illustrate their own children's book. Writers are introduced to a number of illustration tools and the building blocks of narrative writing that result in stories which take a variety of forms including fantasy, fractured fairytales, humor, satire, and realistic fiction. There are only a few standard elements required with respect to the anatomy of all published books. These include front matter such as a title page, copyright statement, acknowledgements, and dedication, in addition to end matter such as an afterword that explains the motivation for the story, expounds on the theme, or offers suggestions for instructional use. Other than that, ingenuity and creative expression are encouraged.

Upon completion, students are given several options for physically publishing their books. These include using online book creators such as Bookemon, Mixbook, Blurb, Snapfish, and Picaboo, all offering soft and hard cover binding options. Several iPad apps and web-based programs for storytelling that have been emerging on the market were also introduced; however, over the last four years nearly all students preferred to create bound books, many of which they gifted to family, mentor teachers, and friends at the holidays (as the course ends in December).

Since the start of the course, my shelves continue to fill with an extensive and delightful collection of children's books authored by pre-service teachers. Over the years these stories have engaged us, connected us, educated us, lifted our spirits, generated meaningful conversations, or simply entertained. Yet, the process did not come easily to all students who had to slay a few writing monsters before they triumphed. This work

describes my experience with teacher candidates in an elementary writing instruction course as first-time authors of children's books, in particular focusing on a writing workshop approach in which the writing conference functions as an effective technique to scaffold writers through the writing process. The paper provides a descriptive account constructed from four years of anecdotal data and student feedback on course evaluations, with the intent of providing the reader as vicarious of an experience as possible in order to generate discussion, inform instruction, or derive personal meanings from my classroom experience.

The theoretical premise upon which this case is built is that writing is an inherently recursive and creative process that is facilitated by a meaning-centered learning environment that more often results in students making meaningful knowledge constructions.

The Writing Monsters

The idea of writing their own children's book initially sounded intriguing to my students; however, the thought of a project that may well take them through the end of the term was equally daunting. It was not long into the term before several writing monsters reared their fuzzy heads. In collaboration with my teacher candidates, we cleverly named them for effect, and even feature them in a digital story that could be used as an instructional tool. Meet Bashful Bandit, Hairy Houdini, Vincent Van Troll, Frankenline, Edgar Allen Go, and the infamous Blanche Pagé (See Table 1). The writing monster profiles were crafted from my classroom observations and represent the writing challenges and fears that my students encountered and had to conquer in writing their stories. I now use the writing monsters theme as an introductory hook first inspired by Fletcher's (2010) advice to young writers, as an entry to one of our first lessons on what it means to be a writer.

Over the course of the last four years, I repeatedly encountered reluctant writers who manifested their struggle with these writing monsters in both overt and subtle ways. For instance, these are writers who approach the project grudgingly, frequently express self-criticism, and lament that they have nothing to write about. Most reluctant writers also practice avoidance, make entries in the writer's notebook only on demand, or excuse themselves during independent writing to tend to various personal matters, and other seemingly inconsequential business. They are also averse to peer editing, respond to the first constructive critique of their work by wanting to change their story, or claim that they simply do not enjoy writing. Collectively, struggling writers exhibited a form of *learned helplessness* (Seligman, 1975), a lack of motivation resulting largely from self-doubt.

These patterns of behavior brought me back to the instrumental work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (2002) who observed urban classrooms and witnessed a few related forms of resistance, and moreover, the habit of outwardly empathic teachers giving certain students "permission to fail" (p. 110). Ladson-Billings describes this practice as allowing a pattern of avoidance, rather than demanding success. In the following excerpt Ladson-Billings (2002) provides a representative example of a teacher who she concludes is ultimately shortchanging Shannon, a young learner who has been given a prompt to write a sentence describing something special that happened over a weekend, but refuses:

After a few minutes one of the teachers comes by this table and notices that Shannon is just sitting while others are working at constructing the sentence. 'Would you like to try writing your sentence today, Shannon?' Shannon shakes her head no, arises from the table and begins to wander around the room. The teacher says to her as she begins wandering, 'That's okay. Maybe you'll feel like writing tomorrow.' This is not an isolated incidence. On a previous visit, my coinvestigator witnessed Shannon talking with Audrey [another student at her table]. Audrey asked Shannon what she was writing. Shannon snapped, 'I ain't writin' nuttin'!' Although most students were encouraged to write each day, Shannon was regularly permitted to fail. (p. 110)

When I first initiated the children's book assignment as a capstone project, I had a tendency to respond to reluctant writers in two ways: 1) indiscriminately peppering hollow praise as a form of positive reinforcement and 2) with shared commiseration because I knew that the project was consuming an inordinate amount of their time. Furthermore, I found myself applying principles of behavior analysis that I had been critiquing in another course under the pretext of Alfie Kohn's work – especially *Punished by Rewards*. As Kohn (2012) maintains, "Praise isn't feedback (which is purely informational); it's a judgment -- and positive judgments are ultimately no more constructive than negative ones (online)" (para. 4). In behavioral terms, I used high-frequency activities such early dismissal or a pass from writing in the writer's notebook as a reinforcer for the lower-frequency (i.e., less desirable) activity – independent writing during our writing workshop. I was allowing students to evade assignments and disrupt the process I wanted them to trust. I was letting them off the hook instead of encouraging them to work through their uncertainty. In doing so, I found myself – much like in Ladson-Billing's (2002) example – giving students *permission to fail*.

Table 1
Writing Monster Profiles

Name	Profile
Bashful Bandit	Seems like somebody already had his best writing ideas, so he is not sure what he can claim as his own. He is so worried about stealing others' ideas that he does not realize that the best story ideas live in him.
Hairy Houdini	An escape artist who is always trying to get out of writing by disappearing to somewhere else, tending to seemingly inconsequential business (e.g., polishing his handcuffs or scoping out new escape routes).
Edgar Allen Go	Thinks he does not enjoy writing and makes a mad dash to the finish line, unable to trust the process and take the time to explore the craft of writing.
Vincent Van Troll	Looks for increasingly extreme measures to inspire his creativity; he feels as though he simply cannot make the cut.
Frankenline	Thinks that all his lines are ugly and is reluctant to share his writing fearing that an angry mob of torch-bearing classmates will chase him down the halls.
Blanche Pagé	Suffers from writer's block and can never figure out how to get started.

Observing them through an anthropological lens, and suspending judgment for a time being, I became mindful of the fact that my students enter the course with an educational history characteristic of Freire's (1972) *banking education* and a preference for assignments that result in immediate gratification over project-based learning requiring prolonged and more in-depth inquiry. After celebrating the first book exhibition showcasing my students' ingenuity and creative expression, the notion of *learned helplessness* (Seligman, 1975) that recurrently presented itself during the writing project became a teachable moment for me: I had to trust the process, much like I was insisting of my writers. Furthermore, I needed to tailor instruction to better meet the needs of all writers so that they may realize their full creative potential. That meant a learner-centered environment in which active learning and inductive instructional methods are primary characteristics. In my experience, the writing workshop is the most effective instructional approach in preparing teacher candidates to develop a repertoire of skills to teach writing. My method of inquiry is grounded in a constructivist approach to assessment and serves as the basis for the instructional modality described herein.

A constructivist approach to assessment involves a variety of formal and informal assessment techniques with an emphasis on formative assessment; that is, a diagnostic type of assessment marked by non-evaluative, ongoing qualitative feedback designed to monitor student progress and redirect learning as needed (Anderson, 2005; Andrade & Cizek, 2010; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2007; Heritage & Popham, 2013; Johnston, 1997; Marzano & Hefleboer, 2012; Marzano & Toth, 2013; McMillan, 2007; Popham, 2013).

Drawing on Bloom's Taxonomy (1984), higher order thinking skills are also emphasized in a constructivist approach to assessment, and accordingly, require a more dynamic level of contextualized learning to facilitate understanding and develop requisite skills. In the process, students build understanding through an experiential and reflective experience, as suggested in the case herein.

Scaffolding, or the graduated but temporary support given to students during the learning task and then removed as the learner becomes more independent, is another characteristic of a constructivist approach to assessment. Scaffolding theory was first introduced by cognitive psychologist, Jerome Bruner (1960), and is often erroneously attributed to psychologist Lev Vygotsky who did not lay claim to the term *scaffolding*, but conceptualized learning much in the same way. To date, few empirical studies offering a thick description of scaffolding can be found in the extant literature. In my interactions with students, the process of the writing conference - is in itself – a form of scaffolding and expanded in the forthcoming section.

A constructivist approach to assessment likewise involves a collaborative and bi-directional learning relationship in which the ongoing assessment practices inform instruction (Popham, 2013). For me, a constructivist approach to assessment requires entering a classroom as both ethnographer and cultural anthropologist and learning about my students as though they are a new culture, from one semester to the next. Through observation, anecdotal notes, a running record, an analysis of the artifacts that students produce, and critical self-reflection, I continue to inform my understanding of learners and refine my instructional practices to support them. In the following section I draw the reader into my classroom to unpack the writing process.

The Writing Process

I implemented the writing workshop method of instruction pioneered by Donald H. Graves and more recently attributed to Lucy M. Calkins, professor of children's literature and founding director of *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project*, and championed by others like writer Ralph Fletcher (1993, 1996), author of books on the craft of writing, and the late Walter Dean Myers, author and national ambassador for young people's literature. The writing workshop is organized according to Figure 1.

Each class session begins with whole group instruction in the form of a mini lesson during which I focus on one teaching point at a time. With respect to the narrative genre, mini lessons focus on the craft of writing regularly modeled through the use of mentor texts as instructional support tools to help writers hone their craft. Whether it is *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street* (Schotter, 1997) to teach about noticing the world around us, *The Kissing Hand* (Penn, 1988) to demonstrate how authors can stretch a moment across the page, *Punctuation Takes a Vacation* (Pulver & Beach, 2003) to depict a world without proper conventions, or *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1999) to show how stories are told otherwise depending on perspective, mentor texts teach craft techniques and help shape writers.

Each mini lesson is followed by independent writing, to which a substantial portion of class time is dedicated. During independent writing students brainstorm, write, edit, and confer with writing partners or with me. Routinely, lessons conclude with a brief author's chair, giving writers an opportunity to share stories in progress and / or final products while welcoming concrete feedback from their peers.

As noted above, the writing workshop is intended to be learner-centered, an environment in which active learning and inductive instructional methods are fundamental characteristics. In the context of this student-centered approach, I also encourage a meaning-centered (see Kovbasyuk & Blessinger, 2013) atmosphere for writing; that is, a classroom environment that encourages students to draw something meaningful from their everyday lives and use it as a springboard or motivation for learning – or in my case, writing. In doing so, I frequently echo educator and writer Ralph Fletcher's edict that the best story ideas are burrowed in us. To that end, I use the metaphor of the *maleta*, a Spanish term for suitcase, to reinforce the idea of meaning-centeredness in the learning process. A *maleta* represents a reservoir of the cultural and social experiences that students bring to school. When viewed as assets and affirmed, the contents of a *maleta* can serve as "funds of knowledge" or resources for educators in preparing culturally

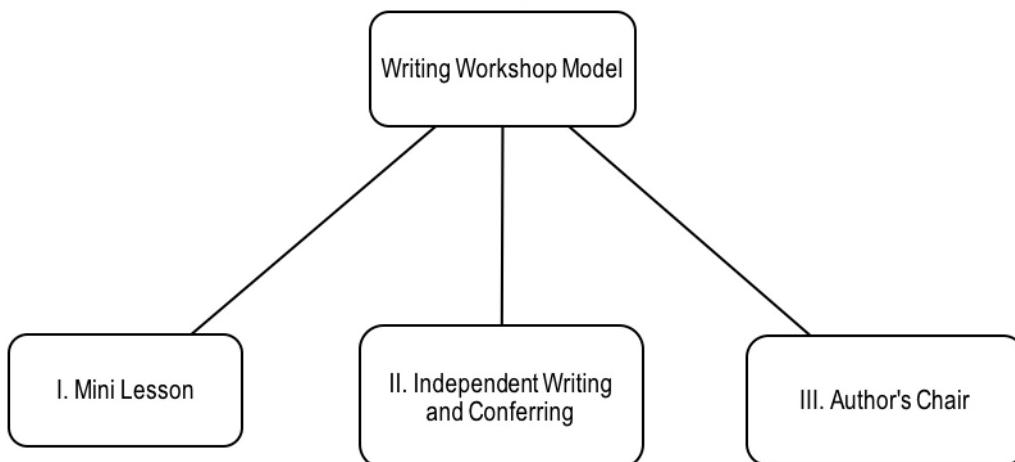
responsive and meaningful lessons (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013). As a primer to the narrative genre, I have students construct a *maleta* and fill it with clippings and other symbolic representations of their experiences that can be used as story seeds. These objects might represent dreams, wonderings, special places, important events or milestones, family stories, and other joyful or even frightening events that continue to linger or have been definitive in their lives. I may also launch the writer's workshop with writing prompts, one in particular entitled *What We Carry* (or variations thereof), during which I ask students to choose an artifact from their *maleta* and write a short vignette about it. Inspired by Tim O'Brien's (2009) collection of short stories about the Vietnam War in *The Things They Carried*, this launching activity is one way students can practice descriptive writing and playing with words. In short, I encourage students to take their writer's notebook in one hand and their *maletas* in the other as an entry to the writing process.

The writing workshop as described herein is primarily implemented at the elementary grade levels and not commonly reported in the academic literature as an approach to teaching writing in higher education. Nevertheless, I wanted to engage my teacher candidates in the writing process, much in the same way that they might engage their own students. While the workshop approach is a worthwhile way to teach writing, it is also pedagogically demanding. Writing conferences as a form of assessment significantly facilitated my efforts.

Conferring as a Form of Assessment

I suspended the use of analytic rubrics to assess my students' writing pieces after one long summer of reflection and perhaps as a small act of resistance against the narrowing definitions of teacher competency and the growing number of rubrics in use to evaluate teacher candidates. Making this decision as our teacher candidates were about to enter a field where more rigorous accreditation standards, curricular mandates, and assessment prevail, seemed like errant behavior. On the contrary, I observed a marked improvement in the substance of the children's books compared to their early work under the weight of rubrics with no discretionary aspects. In the beginning, it was apparent that students were heavily focused on my evaluation of their stories and less on the craft of writing. If writing was going to be a recursive and creative process, using analytic rubrics with narrow criteria and levels of performance to grade writing was reductionist in nature and weakened the heart of the writing process. Initially, some students could not loosen the grip on rubrics and found the ambiguity that resulted in placing less emphasis on formal assessments during the writing

Figure 1
Writing Workshop Components



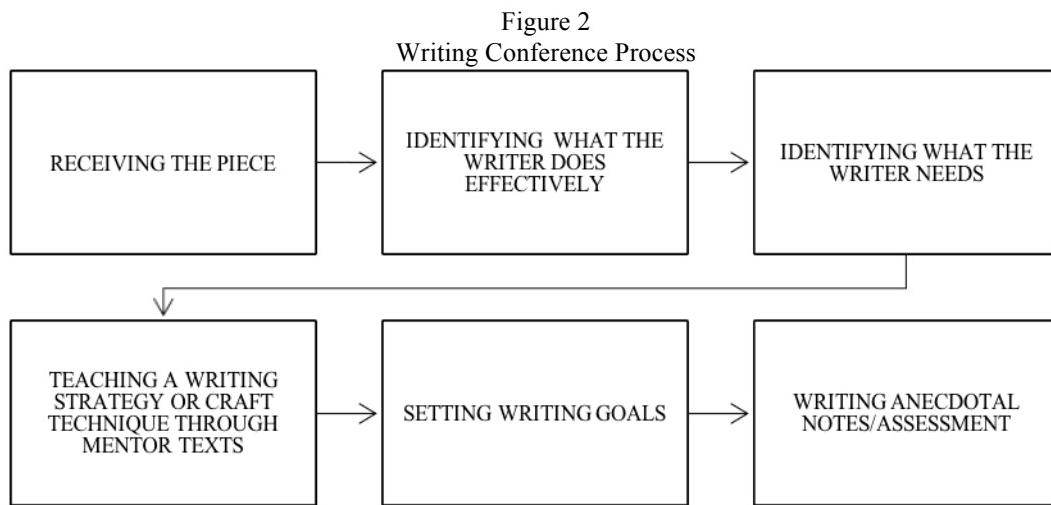
process disconcerting. To provide students with some measures of success, I implemented a holistic rubric as a summative assessment to grade the capstone project. In contrast to an earlier analytic rubric in use, this type of rubric is designed to provide writers with a wider description of the characteristics that exemplify a level of performance and emphasizes what they can demonstrate rather than their shortcomings. For instance, the holistic rubric that was applied as the summative assessment is focused on the building blocks of the narrative genre (e.g., setting, characters, rising action, plot, climax, falling action, point of view, theme, conclusion) and the extent to which each element of the narrative genre is developed.

The primary diagnostic tool or form of assessment of student writing was accomplished through writing conferences, or conferring, as otherwise recognized in the literature in the field of language arts. As described earlier, in the practice of conferring as a primary form of assessment I embrace a constructive literacy approach (Anderson, 2005; Johnston, 1997) within which the assessment of student writing is designed to offer ongoing targeted feedback and incremental goals for improvement, as well as guide subsequent re-engagement lessons. In the process, I build my students' stamina as writers, improve my *assessment stance* (Anderson, 2005; Johnston, 1997) and overall effectiveness as an instructor of elementary writing instruction, and better meet the learning outcomes of the course.

At first, the writing conferences served more or less as benchmark points to loosely gauge progress – essentially an informal assessment practice of floating around the classroom and proving emotional support or

positive reinforcement. I restructured the manner in which I conferred with students and began to function mainly as a writing coach who learned to focus more on the writer than the writing - sage advice heeded from the work of Calkins and Fletcher. As I continued to refine the role, I was able to differentiate (or tailor) writing instruction, which in turn diminished the range of struggles students were experiencing.

Influenced in large part by the work of Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) as well as Calkins, Hartman, and White (2005), I set up the architecture of the writing conference to take the form in Figure 2. I reserve time for conferences during each class session, and unlike earlier in the course where I roved around the room, I meet with only four or five students, depending on the length and frequency of class meetings. The conferences are relatively short, lasting anywhere from five to ten minutes, and are conducted across phases of the writing process including prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. I also confer with students outside of class. While in class, I confer with students during the independent writing portion of the class, designating a small meeting space in the back of the room, or as the physical environment allows from one semester to the next. I determine with whom I confer by maintaining a status of the class chart on which students insert name cards to indicate where they are in the writing process. On some occasions, I simultaneously organize peer-to-peer conferences that students arrange with writing partners. I provide students with a peer-to-peer conference guide so that the conversations are productive. During this time, the room gently buzzes. When I confer with students, I begin with the important ritual of *receiving the piece*, originally a peer response



strategy developed by Graves (1983), then proceed to act as a writing coach, assess, and re-engage struggling writers.

For me, *receiving the piece* means giving the writer an audience (whether a teacher or peer) and listening to him or her read a writing piece at various stages of the writing process. I encourage my writers to receive one another's writing with a spirit of generosity and in doing so extend the same nonjudgmental feedback that they wish for themselves. Oftentimes students are hesitant to share their writing because it requires some risk-taking (something that does not come easily to all students), and as such, appreciate an accepting audience. In *receiving a piece*, I put corrective tendencies aside and describe the effect that the writing has on me as a reader, and not as an instructor. This protocol became an important starter to the writing conference because it validated my students' writing and their emerging voices as writers. It is also an opportunity to ask questions that may help expand the writing. In doing so, I periodically draw on my qualitative research skills in interviewing wherein I position myself as learner and exhibit a degree of naiveté, along with the practice of analytic listening.

Secondly, I focus on what the writer needs and one teaching point or language function at a time, whether it is a story lead, falling action, or a writing strategy such as crafting "golden lines," described by Fletcher (2010) as a "sweet sentence that makes you sit up straight, go back, and read it all over again" (pp. 108-115).

Thirdly, during each conference I sit side-by-side the writer signifying that a collegial interaction is about to take place. I also have green, yellow, and pink highlighters ready for use. A green highlighter is used to mark the effective use of craft traits and what the writer does well, the yellow to highlight suggestions

and elements of writing in need of revision, and pink to indicate underdeveloped parts or draw attention to writing conventions such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall readability that need to be addressed later during the editing phase.

To give the reader a sense of the dialogue, a selective transcription of a conference with a writer at the revision phase of the writing process is provided in the Appendix. After reflecting on this writing conference and others, I added my journal notes to highlight certain common practices of which I became more aware and proficient in, with each new cohort of students. In the process of reflecting, I grew more conscious and empathetic of the vulnerability students experience in sharing their writing with me. The nature of this particular conference is representative of others throughout the course of the semester.

First and foremost, writing conferences such as the one with Muna, were conversational and primarily about writing. However, an undercurrent of writing conferences is helping students gain self-esteem as writers, but doing so through scaffolding or graduated instruction, as I hoped to have done with her and others.

In the absence of analytic rubrics, I maintain anecdotal notes to document student progress. Initially, I wrote anecdotal notes in a semester-long reflective journal. Given the abundance of emerging software, web-based resources, and digital tools to support instruction, I also play-tested a few iPad applications to keep records of my writing conferences with students. One of these applications currently in use is *Explain Everything*, which functions as a small interactive whiteboard on the iPad wherein a user creates a screencast of a tutorial or instructional video to teach a concept, explain a problem, or draw a diagram. The narrated screencast can be exported by way of social

media, email, Dropbox, or a Safari link. Unlike others, Explain Everything supports Word documents and PDF files, making it convenient to import students' writing pieces and comment on them during a writing conference. Since my introduction to this screen-casting tool, other apps designed specifically for reading and writing assessment were unveiled, which I continue to playtest for utility. One of these is *Confer*, an electronic conference notebook that is helpful in organizing conference notes and tracking student progress. In this app I document students' strengths, my teaching points, and set goals for the next writing conference. I can also upload data to a spreadsheet making it easier to code and look for patterns across conferences.

The writing conference is a valuable feature of the writing course described herein because it enables me to tap into students' maletas and discover their interests, as well as better understand their cognitive processes. Through these one-on-one semi-structured conversations, I am able to tailor the writing process so that writers feel successful in the larger endeavor.

Author's Chair

In place of a final exam, the writing course is capped by a celebratory book exhibition – the grand author's chair. During the exhibition, authors and their invited guests float around the room and take their time reading the assortment of books featured proudly on table-top easels. A stack of comment cards is placed beside each book so that authors can receive feedback other than my own. The most meaningful aspects of the end-of-semester book exhibition are when authors volunteer to do read-alouds in the coveted author's chair. These instances are videotaped and serve as sources of visual data or artifacts that candidates may subsequently add to their digital portfolios. Selected images from the books my students published are featured in a flipbook that can be accessed at the following URL: <http://animoto.com/play/J9jPq0uvVGSnM7S01RAUfQ>

These images capture the rewards that came from taking creative risks and trusting the process. In each story, the author's plot line and character arc are drawn from meaningful, real life experiences, affirming educator and writer Ralph Fletcher's advice to writers that the best story ideas live within us. It is by trusting the process in the writing workshop that such stories can emerge.

Student Feedback

Upon completion of the course, I asked students to respond to two prompts either as a last entry in their writer's notebook, on the course evaluations, or online: Describe the overall effect that the writing approach and/or overall experience in the writing instruction

course had on you personally. And, in what ways might the experience in the writing instruction course shape your view of teaching writing? A review of the feedback collected from students over the last four years validate my implementation of the writer's workshop approach to preparing teacher candidates to be thoughtful writing teachers. Several representative comments are provided. For instance, Maddie comments on her commitment to and investment in the project, alluding to the intrinsic rewards that can come from project-based learning:

The most satisfying aspect was the way my book turned out, and how I worked on my book all semester. The late nights and all the changes that I made to it were well worth it, because in the end my book came out exactly the way I wanted it to turn out. I am so proud of myself. I did not think that I had it in me to write like that and produce my own children's book. . . I could not have asked for a better project to show me what I got.

In the process of building her narrative and gathering historical material from her parents to shape it, the writing experience was authenticated for Ajša, suggesting the importance of motivating students by planning writing assignments that enable meaningful connections:

I have never been asked to do a project like that... I did not know what to think at first... but it was the single most important writing that I have ever done because I was able to learn things about my family history that I did not know... I have a new appreciation for my parents and their struggle coming here [the United States] with next to nothing... and the sadness that they feel every time they talk about [home]. I will never forget how that moment when I gave my dad a copy of my book he teared up and my mom ordered copies for everyone.

Ellen looks back on the experience of writing her book and surrendering to the process. In discovering her untapped capabilities and taking pride in her published book, she also contemplates the benefits of nurturing a love of writing in her future students through a tactile, experiential approach:

It's something you have to do to understand. Every week there was a moment that taught me something textbooks couldn't and something about myself. I don't know how kids could possibly like to write with all the scripted lessons that we have to follow. We're going to have a generation of kids who hate to write... I'm one

of them. . . I'm convinced that something happens in the brain chemistry when students are allowed to be creative and write as it did for me. It didn't happen right away but once I let myself go to the process, it took me to another place artistically and emotionally too... I could have worked on the book all semester. Wait, I think I did!

Similarly, Simone saw value in the writing experience despite her frustrations with aspects of writing her book. She learned to navigate the terrain which resulted in not only an appreciation of the circuitous process that stretches a writer, but a book that may one day connect her to her family in ways unforeseen:

I was visited by every writing monster we talked about in class but I made friends with them and succeeded! It was a worthwhile project because after some trials and tribulations I created something that I treasure that is part of me and will pass on to my grandchildren someday.

Ruby recollects her earlier schooling experiences and reinforces the idea that assessment should be individualized and respond to the needs of each writer. This struck me as a particularly important observation given the demographics, range of early literacy experiences, linguistic diversity, and students with special needs who will require writing interventions, to be encountered across the classrooms in which she will be teaching:

I know that when I was younger I was a reluctant writer and it was mainly because I felt like my writing wasn't good enough, especially since no matter how hard I tried I always received an "okay" grade for what I wrote. It was as if nothing was good enough and it was very discouraging because I didn't know how to get a better grade. After a while I didn't care anymore. It was also hard to start writing because I could never find things to write about, or the topics weren't relatable so that also made writing difficult... I think the way we did it was extremely helpful.

As a teacher, Lauren intends to draw on her own struggles during the writing process as opportunities for teachable moments to inspire writing that is both purposeful and meaningful:

I will use my own reluctance and my final outcome to inspire kids. I will also encourage students to really think about what means something to them rather than write just to write which is what I was doing at first.

Simon reached a similar conclusion:

I want [my students] to experience that same joy that I did. I want them to be proud of their writing and I want them to be able to show it off and I want them to learn that it is not going to be perfect the first time. That it takes mistakes and changes throughout the writing process before they get to the final product.

In envisioning her future practice, Anna Lisa comments on the importance of recognizing the vulnerability her writers may experience in sharing their writing, a position that was also revealed during writing conferences:

I would want [my students] to be happy with what they have written and not to be embarrassed of their writings to the point where they won't want anyone to read it. I was like that and I dreaded it [sharing writing in progress] but it got to be something really useful when I realized that I wasn't going to be marked down but that it was a real chance for me to be respected as a writer... My vision is to create an atmosphere of where my students don't feel embarrassed of their writing and motivate each other like my classmates did and my writing partner did.

Frankie's own vulnerability made him cognizant of the writing monsters his own students may also encounter:

I will try to give them positive reinforcement and concrete support like we did during the writing conference. For some reason that seemed to be key with me. Instead of being put down on what I did wrong, [I was] showed little tweaks that made the story better.

Max suggests that every writer can develop his or her voice and in the process writing can have transformative potential: "My expectation is that each writer will find their own style and be able to share that ah ha moment when they realize that they were writers all along." Francine's position as a future writing teacher is simple and elegant: "Children need someone who holds no barrier."

Upon further reflection on my experience with reluctant writers, my understanding is extended by Mackiewicz and Thompson's (2014) timely quantitative microanalysis of cognitive scaffolding in a writing center. Drawing on a random selection of ten highly rated conferences, they coded for effective tutoring strategies that were organized into three categories including instruction, cognitive scaffolding,

and motivational scaffolding. For instance, Mackiewicz and Thompson describe the most frequent strategies applied by tutors to help writers achieve their goals: telling (instruction entailing targeted advice), pumping questions (cognitive scaffolding entailing prodding for ideas), suggesting (instruction), and showing concern (motivational scaffolding) (p. 65). In their study, the analysis of discourse in particular, helps to better frame, analyze, as well as validate my approach in scaffolding struggling writers through the writing process. Furthermore, Mackiewicz and Thompson's conclusions enhance the theoretical premise upon which this paper is built and contributes an additional theoretical construct that both problematizes – or sophisticates – the notion of scaffolding described herein.

I also appropriate Robert Kegan's (1995) theory of meaning-making development which he conceptualizes as a self-evolution that takes place from adolescence through adulthood. Kegan (1995) emphasizes the need for educators to build developmental bridges (akin to scaffolding) in the process of students' self-evolution and is worth quoting at length:

If our curricular aims... are somewhat over the head of the entering student, then we must build a transitional or bridging context... that is both meaningful to those who will not yet understand that curriculum and facilitative of a transformation of mind so that they will come to understand that curriculum. We cannot simply stand on our favored side of the bridge and worry or fume about the many who have not yet passed over. A bridge must be well anchored on both sides, with as much respect for where it begins as for where it ends (p. 62).

Kegan's constructive-developmental theory is instructive in understanding how to establish a meaning-centered and meaning-making classroom as a means of enhancing student learning towards self-actualization that was inferred from my students' summative remarks.

In subsequent reiterations of this work, I endeavor to continue to draw across disciplines and make interdisciplinary connections to deepen my understanding of the behaviors of the reluctant writers discussed earlier in this paper and further inform my preparation of the next generation of writing teachers for the K-12 classroom.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to provide a retrospective account of my experiences with teacher candidates in elementary writing instruction as first time authors of children's books who had to slay a few

writing monsters over the course of the semester in order to feel successful in the larger endeavor. It reinforces a writer's workshop approach to teaching writing, highlighting the practice of conferring with writers as a valuable form of assessment because it allows an instructor to scaffold students in a manner that supports both the fears and cognitive differences students present, as well as the recursive nature of writing. Through this approach I hope that my students will find the time to reflect on their own writing so that they may, in turn, anticipate the needs of the learners with whom they will be working. As educator Mem Fox (1993) writes, "If you are not a writer, you will not understand the difficulties of writing. If you are not a writer, you will not know the fears and hopes of the writers you teach" (p. 163). I also hope that my experience with anxious and reluctant writers serves a paradigmatic or illustrative purpose that may inform other academicians and professionals in their respective fields, in the best interest of students.

Despite my best efforts, in the last two years state-mandated teacher certification requirements such as a new (and highly contested) field assessment known as edTPA, three new exams, more rigorous accreditation standards, and a move toward Common Core State Standards (CCSS)—a Washington driven national K-12 curriculum—have significantly shaped the work that my colleagues and I do with teacher candidates. In response to raising the bar for accreditation, it is becoming increasingly more challenging to utilize our classrooms to nurture creativity and innovation, open minds, search for understanding, and engage constructivist practices such as those described herein. Perhaps of equal importance is a dialogue about how to prepare K-12 students for a globally interconnected society where the value of creative writing has increasing value but is being overshadowed by a shift to more evidence-based, technical writing and a general approach to language arts characterized by Dave Coleman, a lead author of the CCSS, as "read like a detective; write like an investigative reporter" (p. 4). In and of themselves, these skills are not without value. However, the consensus among educators is that the CCSS favor a skills-centric curriculum that will drive out the arts, literary and cultural knowledge, as well as writing in a wide range of genres. A new crew of writing monsters might soon rear their fuzzy heads.

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Appendix
Annotated Script of a Writing Conference

Transcript	Reflective Notes
Me: Hi Muna [pseudonym]. How's your writing going?	<i>Sitting side-by-side signifying that a collegial interaction is about to take place.</i>
Student: I don't know. Fine, I guess (shrugs shoulders and smiles self-consciously).	
Me: You don't know?	<i>Get the writer talking about writing. Pinpoint how the writer can be supported. Acknowledge apprehension but emphasize process.</i>
Student: Yeah. I just read Lana's story and she's practically done with it... It's so good...	
Me: Tell me what you're working on... What specifically can I help you with today?	
Student: I don't know. Just making it a good story...	
Me: What do you think makes a good story?	<i>Recognize that creativity is fragile. Empathy is important but avoid coddling. Place responsibility on writer and refer to mini lessons or draw on other instructional supports in which he or she can identify craft traits on his or her own as a way to respond to consternation and self-doubt.</i>
Student: I don't know. That it's not boring... It sounds too serious. Like reading a history book... I'm not... good at this.	
Me: What were some of the gems or quotes from the readings that you wrote in your writer's notebook?	
Student: Fletcher said that...	
Me: OK, there you go. Let's work with that.	
Me: Would you read your draft for me, please.	<i>Receiving the piece. Allow student to read his or her writing as a way to take ownership of the writing.</i>
Student: OK, but it's not that good.	
Me: That's why we're here. I'm all ears!	<i>Avoid entertaining too much self-criticism and deflect quickly. Maintain momentum of writing conference.</i>
Student: reads draft	<i>Just listen. Don't write during this time as doing so can be unsettling for the writer and convey a purely evaluative encounter that can shut down the conversation.</i>
Me: You have some very special scenes so far. For instance, when you started to write about returning to [names country] for the first time in a long time... I can only imagine how that felt. In fact, as I was listening I was thinking of my own childhood... How did you feel in that moment you got off the plane? Or even before you got off the plane? What were you thinking? Or	<i>React as a reader, first and foremost. Avoid general, empty praise; point out something specific that is done well. Ask questions.</i>

Transcript	Reflective Notes
doing?	
Student: There were a lot of emotions... I was excited and nervous... I looked over at my Mom and I could see the mix of pain and joy in her eyes... because they weren't allowed to come back for a long time... Then when we got outside the wind was brutally hot... it was so humid... I was suffocating... seriously... It took me so long to iron my hair and I looked like a poodle the second I walked out...	<i>Get the writer to talk through the writing. During this time practice patient probing.</i>
Me: Haha... OK. Well Muna, there you go. Just like that! You brought me there a little more... You want to show the reader, don't just tell... Last week in class we talked about leads and rising action... Did you look at any of the mentor texts to see what the author does... and if there are some craft traits that can help you with your own writing?	<i>Focus on talk about writing. Graduate the instruction through conversation. Use own advice of showing the writer rather than telling the writer.</i>
Student: There was <i>The Things They Carried</i> , and another one, I think. I can't recall. The children's books.	
Me: OK. I brought two more... Maybe this one since I've been listening to it on the treadmill and I thought it might help after reading your last draft.	<i>Use mentor texts as instructional supports. Tailor instruction and be ready with specific supports.</i>
Me: Do you mind? (as book is handed to student.) Let me hear your best read-aloud voice, starting where I have the arrow markers.	<i>Keep student engaged. Allow student to do the work and/or most of the talking. Expose student to writing examples.</i>
Student: Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again... peering closer through the rusted spokes of the gate I saw that the lodge was uninhabited. No smoke came from the chimney, and the little lattice windows gaped forlorn. Then, like all dreamers, I was possessed of a sudden supernatural power and passed like a spirit through the barrier before me. The drive wound away in front of me, twisting and turning... it was narrow and unkempt, not the drive that we had known... Nature had come into her own again and, little by little, in her stealthy, insidious way had encroached upon the drive with long, tenacious fingers... The beeches with white, naked limbs leant close to one another, their branches intermingled in a strange embrace, making a vault above my head like the archway of a church... No hand had checked their progress, and they had gone native now, rearing to monster height without a bloom, black and ugly as the nameless parasites that grew beside	<p><i>Muna reads aloud an excerpt from <i>Rebecca</i> by Daphne du Maurier (1971).</i></p> <p><i>The intent is to allow a writer to experience or react to a piece of published writing, to identify the writer's craft, to add texture to the writing conference, to allow the writer to be taken away in the moment.</i></p>

Transcript	Reflective Notes
them... I came upon it suddenly... and I stood, my heart thumping in my breast, the strange prick of tears behind my eyes. There was Manderley... secretive and silent... Time could not wreck the perfect symmetry of those walls, nor the site itself, a jewel in the hollow of a hand.	
Student: I love this...	
Me: Dreamy, right? I read somewhere that Daphne wasn't considered in the same league as other female novelists but she was a great storyteller. As a great storyteller, what does the author do here? How does she set the scene?	
Student: Like sounds effects and that?	
Me: Are they sound effects?	
Student: No... I was thinking about the <i>Rollercoaster</i> book and the exercise we did. I mean description... I felt like I could hear something because she created a mood...	
Me: Oh, OK, she does create a mood so vivid that maybe you can imagine some sounds... Specifically though... she's quite effective in one respect. Read a few lines that you like. Here, use a highlighter. I don't mind.	
Student: I like " <i>I passed like a spirit through the barrier before me...</i> " Also, " <i>No smoke came from the chimney, and the little lattice windows gaped forlorn.</i> " And when she writes, " <i>The beeches with white, naked limbs leant close to one another, their branches intermingled in a strange embrace, making a vault above my head like the archway of a church.</i> " [italics indicate phrases Muna underlined as she selected passages of her liking]	Talk about writing techniques. Identify certain language functions in use.
Me: I like that last line especially. That feeling of grandeur when looking up...	
Student: Oh yeah. She uses a lot of imagery. Similes and metaphors, right?	
Me: And sensory images. You got it. In such an ethereal way... It sets the mood. You're right.	
Student: Ethereal?	
Me: Mmmhm.	
Student: I like that and how she slows down the entire scene to tell it...	
Me: Agreed. Think about all the pivotal moments in your story... or your favorite memories... What are	Bring it back to the writer's piece and pinpoint areas for

Transcript	Reflective Notes
they?	<i>improvement.</i>
Student: Climbing the steps of the [monument]... the end of Ramadan... hearing the adhan over the loud speaker... sitting and talking to my grandmother.	
Me: I'd love to hear that conversation... What could you do with these?	<i>Allow room for self-evaluation. Have student identify areas for improvement in own writing.</i>
Student: Make the scene come to life... Add in the conversation... Would it be all right to add some [foreign] words for things?	
Me: Great. Yes, of course... as you like. To me, these are all golden moments in your story... Scenes that you can make come alive, as you say. You have an opportunity to tell a beautiful story about your native country and all those memories that you hold dear... Use the senses to describe. What do you see... hear... feel... smell... taste... Let's do this... Until our next writing conference, try rewriting the first significant scene... landing in [names country] after a 14-hour trip and heading to the family home. Take me all the way up to the front door, to jodedah's door.	<i>Identify one specific goal to be accomplished by the next conference.</i>
Student: I will. Can I send it to you this weekend?	<i>Express gratitude at end of conference.</i>
Me: I like your enthusiasm. The weekend is fine... Most importantly, thank you for sharing your writing with me.	
Student: Yay, thank you so much.	